

Introduce universal design to enhance performance

Universal Design is defined as the design of products and environments that are accessible and usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or modification. Its key principles are simplicity, flexibility and efficiency. And whether we realize it or not, most of us benefit from universal design on a daily basis. For example, text messaging service on cell phones from an employer could be used by many employees.

Universal Design offers a lens through which every aspect of a business can be viewed and a set of tools through which products, services, customer satisfaction, and employee recruitment and retention can be improved. In the workplace, it is especially beneficial to streamlining processes when applied to the physical environment, communications, and technology.



For more information about how universal design can enhance your company, visit JAN at www.jan.wvu.edu and search 'universal design' or call 800.526.7234; TTY 877.781.9403

Making adjustments to enhance employee performance

Often, a modification or adjustment to a job or work environment enables all employees to achieve higher performance. Employers frequently provide flexible work hours, telecommunications and telecommuting options, or ergonomic adjustments to a work space to improve employee performance. Including all employees in developing the adjustments saves time and money.

There are a number of adjustments that benefit all employees by improving performance and by increasing efficiency:

- Part-time or modified work schedules.
- Wireless headset, keyboard or mouse.
- Spell check software.
- Text messaging.
- Non-fluorescent lighting.
- Ergonomic chairs.
- Touch screens and scanners.

Employee plans improve performance

All employees, including those who have disabilities expect to be held accountable for their work performance. If an employee who has a disability cannot satisfactorily perform the essential functions of his or her job after a full and defined trial period, and with appropriate reasonable accommodations, then his or her employment may be terminated.

In any hiring situation, there is a possibility for poor performance. People who have disabilities welcome opportunities to improve their performance and contribute to business growth. A performance action plan gives struggling employees the opportunity to succeed while still holding them accountable for performance.

Develop performance plans

It is not always clear why an employee has poor performance and developing a plan can help both the employer and the employee determine if there is an underlying cause for poor performance, such as lack of training or a needed accommodation.

The following suggestions can help managers and employees develop a plan to improve performance that does not meet expectations.

- Document the employee's performance areas that need improvement. Provide facts and examples to further clarify the severity or pattern of performance concerns.
- Develop an action plan that includes objectives that are specific, measurable, accurate, relevant and bound to a specific time frame.
- Review the performance improvement plan with another manager or human resource professional to ensure the documentation is stated clearly and without emotion.
- Meet with the employee to clearly lay out the areas for improvement and plan of action.
- Modify the action plan, if needed, after receiving the employee's input and feedback.
- Establish regular follow-up meetings to discuss and document progress toward objectives.

Performance plans provide good opportunities for employers to learn more about what employees need to maximize success in a position, sometimes leading to company-wide improvements.